

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



9 MARCH 2025

*The
Season
of
Lent*



1st in the season of Lent – preparation (for Easter)

WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Set aside a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are. We join with them all.

Go to your prepared place OR prepare a space in the house; a comfortable chair, a lit candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

Focusing ... As we pause to contemplate this ongoing season of Epiphany – unveiling, seeing, making known - we hear of and are invited to name our own experiences of the ministry of Jesus as revealed through the Gospel of Luke.

Acknowledgement of Country: We come to meet today from all manner of places, and on the Country of diverse Clans and Nations of First Peoples', and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and commit ourselves afresh to the journey of justice and reconciliation.

THE GATHERING TIME

Call to Worship

There are different gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same God who is served.

We come from different places and with different concerns, but we come to worship the same God: the same God whose purposes are achieved through the people of God.

God has done wonderful things as the realm of God has touched our community and called and equipped us for service: for together we are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it.

So come, let us worship God as the Body of Christ in this place, in the power and with the gifts of God's Holy Spirit.

Hymn/song: (TiS) 143 Immortal, Invisible, God only wise

(Please sit)

Prayers of thanksgiving and praise, and a time for confession of our brokenness and of our need for healing. Time also to listen to God's word of loving forgiveness.

Confession: - Let us be aware of who we are before the holy God ... *Silent reflection*

Hear the promise of gracious forgiveness & acceptance; God offers a new start – your sins are forgiven!

Thanks be to God!

Hymn/song: (TiS) 745 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

THE LISTENING TIME

Readings from the Bible: (Ready by Lorraine Denniston) Deuteronomy 26.1-11 - First Fruits and Tithes:

“When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess and you possess it and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.’

⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the Lord your God: ‘A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in



number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he

brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God.

¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Luke 4.1-13 - The Testing of Jesus: Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’ ”

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’ ”

⁹ Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’

¹¹ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

¹² Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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Some notes on the Word – Tony Floyd

In Deuteronomy - “When you get into the land and the crops start to come...” **start** to come notice, “...bring the first of them to me (God)!”

All this to people who had no corner store to go to for supplies. All this to people who may well have been struggling to make the remains of the previous years' crops of grains, fruit and vegies last another week or two longer. "Just when you look like getting some fresh vegies and those fantastic first apples and oranges - pick them and give them away!" You will be tempted to keep the best for yourself – BUT!!!!

Give the FIRST FRUITS - a "Thank you ... I remember!" offering.

So what is the temptation?

On one side it is the temptation to believe that we are *self-made persons (for good or ill)* - we are who we are and have become who we are with no relevant (or irrelevant for that matter) activity of God in our lives.

We forget who and whose we are, that we are so often dependent on others for help, rain, sunshine and so on. Because life is uncertain, we easily believe that our needs come first, the establishment of our own present & future security is primary. It follows from this thought pattern that our giving to God is to come from our plenty. This means that offerings come from what is left after all the bills have been paid and, if possible, our reserve targets have been met.

This story reminds us that first of all we must **stop and remember** who we are and where we have come from. In its simplicity and naivete, those who told and heard this story were quite convinced that we would be so glad and thankful for our freedoms that everyone would willingly and with great joy give the very first (perhaps your only) fruits to God.

The instruction continues for **there is still another temptation to confront. The second temptation comes when one sets out in a new direction.** This is the temptation to forget our connections into a past and the pains of peoples in the past! These temptations are about setting and using norms of behaviour that are based on expediency and justified ends.

Our "freedoms" (whatever they are) are always a "gift" from God built upon that great freedom when God brought US out of our slavery. Therefore, they must be celebrated and freely shared with others who are not yet 'free'. Therefore, when you have remembered and given your offering of thanks, it will be impossible for you to celebrate on your own. You will invite those who have nothing in your own society to share in your celebration with you.

"You, together with the Priests and aliens who live among you shall celebrate with all the bounty which God has given to you and to your house."

In the great hymn by Martin Luther "A mighty fortress is our God" there are the lines: *The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him, one little word shall fell him!"* The reading from Luke for today is about that *one little word* – listen for the Word of God...

2nd reading: Jesus in the desert: Luke 4.1-13

Note the setting:

- Jesus has become an adult. He is now 30 years old and has come to his cousin - John the baptiser, for baptism.
- After his dramatic episode with the "dove" and the "voice from heaven", Luke provides a family tree tracing Jesus' human ancestry all the way back to God.
- There is no baptismal party, no family celebration to mark this event, just a non-optional trip into the red centre.

So, what happens that might be speaking to us?

Notice this is not a holiday weekend off to the shack kind of act. It is full of symbolism for those who knew the old stories. All of the Gospel stories tell us that the Spirit of God influenced this trip: -

In the good news named Mark: "...the Spirit **drove** Jesus..."

In the good news named Matthew: "...the Spirit **led** Jesus..."

In the good news named Luke: "...Jesus **was led by** the Spirit..."

So **first** we note that the “desert place” of these struggles, the **place of temptation**, is a place where God’s Spirit is PRESENT. Jesus has taken a significant step in coming to John.

So this desert place is NOT a situation of abandonment by God; this is the place of wondering, the centre where one can seek after truth, and test possibilities. And Jesus does.

Luke’s description of Jesus’ encounter is powerful; it is demanding and intensely personal, precisely like the struggle between two identifiable energies or persons. And Luke’s story telling brings us to that *one little word* from Luther’s hymn – perhaps it is not the word “Jesus”, but the word that Jesus uses to shape his ministry and to claim his ministry in that desert place: NO!

You see this was the beginning time, the moment **AFTER** commitment and commencement for Jesus’ ministry. These questions and offerings are about good and useful things. They are not about the use of evil, or demonstrable wickedness. That is why they are tempting offers because they were good gifts, useful gifts, in the ministry to which Jesus had just committed himself.

Who could not use bread in this world of ours? In this nation of ours? In this suburb of ours?

Who would not find power useful in changing life and circumstances for many, many people in our circle of acquaintances, our land, and the world? Our culture certainly values power – we even speak now of governments being elected to power, not to government or to office!

We have contempt for leaders who appear powerless. we admire people who have it and know how to use it? We could often do with just a bit more of it ourselves.

And Jesus refuses both. Jesus says “No!”

Then the trump card – religion! That’s a good thing, surely? And the response? “No!” again!

The first word we hear from Jesus as an adult in this good news is “No!” Here at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus is known for what he rejects rather than what he affirms. Before he teaches, lectures or heals, he utters that simple word “No!”

Jesus was sent to the cross because of what he said and did. Or as today’s reading would have it – because of what he refused to say and to do. He was put on the cross because when others tried to determine the nature of his offering to God – he said “NO!” Luther’s *one little word* that fells the prince of darkness – then and now!

Amen! Thanks be to God!

THE RESPONDING TIME

Hymn/Song: (TIS) 627 Praise and thanksgiving

Prayers of the people – Prepared by Mardie Townsend

In our cycle of prayer for peoples around the world, we pray for the leaders and people of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community but who are not at worship with us today."

Light the candle.

Today, our prayers are adapted from Janet Nelson’s prayer book, ‘Let Us Pray’.

At the end of each set of petitions, when I say ‘God in whom we trust and hope’, please respond **‘save us when we call upon you’**.

Let us pray.

Long ago you brought your people out of slavery to freedom: hear the cries of your people today who are held in the bondage of oppression, persecution or war. We think especially of the people of Ukraine and of Palestine, of women in Afghanistan suffering under the restrictions of Taliban rule, and of refugees and asylum seekers. Inspire us to do all we can, through our votes and through prayer and practical support to be agents of freedom and peace.

God in whom we trust and hope, **save us when we call upon you.**

You led your people through a desert to a land flowing with milk and honey: hear the cries of your people today who are hungry, homeless and for whom daily life is a struggle for survival. We think of those for whom rising living costs are not just posing difficulties but posing a threat to survival. And today especially we think of those impacted by Cyclone Alfred and all who are suffering under the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Help and inspire us to do whatever we can to care for your creation and all its peoples.

God in whom we trust and hope, **save us when we call upon you.**

With a mighty hand and outstretched arm you led your people out of Egypt: hear the cries of those today who have lost their way, all who wander without direction, purpose or hope in their lives. We think of those experiencing mental illness, domestic violence, loss of employment. Help and inspire us to offer a space of inclusion and welcome to all in need.

God in whom we trust and hope, **save us when we call upon you.**

You sent your angels to minister to your Son in the desert: hear the cries of those today who experience pain, loneliness, despair or grief, all who are in need of your tenderness and care. Help and inspire us to reach out to those who are suffering, both within our community and beyond.

God in whom we trust and hope, **save us when we call upon you.**

With arms outstretched upon a cross you brought redemption to your people: hear the cries of those today who long to hear your message of forgiveness, reconciliation and love. Help and inspire us to be agents of that reconciliation and love in our daily lives and as a Christian community.

God in whom we trust and hope, **save us when we call upon you.**

And now let us join in the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil,
for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen

Hymn/song: (TIS) 657 God of Freedom, God of justice

(If you are able – please remain standing for the blessing)

The Blessing –

Whatever you do, on word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God through him. (Colossians 3.17)

The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself;
the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service;

the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;

and the blessing of God almighty, the Creator, the Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen!**

Go in peace ... to love and serve the Lord

Have some silence or music as you transition back into your daily normal ...

Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES